



## CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENTS

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December 10, 2009

Sustainable Communities Planning Grant and Incentives Program  
C/O The Department of Conservation  
Office of Sustainability  
801 K Street, MS 24-01  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Members and Staff of the Strategic Growth Council:

The California Association of Councils of Governments (CALCOG) is pleased with the opportunity you have given the public to review and comment upon the *Draft Sustainable Communities Planning Grant and Incentives Program (November 2009)*.

While some of our member agencies have already sent you separate letters commenting upon the draft, our purpose in writing this letter is to show there is a consensus position among regional agencies throughout the State on specific factors contained within the Guidelines. This consensus is illustrated by the fact that many individual member agencies have signed this letter.

We understand that an additional workshop on the Guidelines may be held in the near future so we will probably submit additional comments on further changes made to the *Draft Guidelines* in that workshop. In addition, we will endeavor to submit a redline version of the *Draft Guidelines* in the near future since that suggestion was made by Council members and staff at the workshops.

Following are the specific comments we have about the *Draft Guidelines*:

The Guidelines as written could be more strategic in their focus and proposed implementation. The primary strategies for implementation of SB 375 are being developed by most regions through the development of Sustainable Communities Strategies (SCS) and Regional Blueprints. The Guidelines should be more closely linked to each region's Blueprint or SCS approach.

### MEMBER AGENCIES

Association of Bay Area Governments  
Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments  
Butte County Association of Governments  
Calaveras Council of Governments  
Coachella Valley Association of Governments  
Contra Costa Transportation Authority  
Council of Fresno County Governments  
Council of San Benito County Governments  
El Dorado County Transportation Commission  
Humboldt County Association of Governments  
Kern Council of Governments  
Kings County Association of Governments  
Lake County/City Area Planning Council  
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority  
Madera County Transportation Commission  
Mendocino Council of Governments  
Merced County Association of Governments  
Metropolitan Transportation Commission  
Orange County Transportation Authority  
Placer County Transportation Planning Agency  
Sacramento Area Council of Governments  
San Bernardino Associated Governments  
San Diego Association of Governments  
San Joaquin Council of Governments  
San Luis Obispo Council of Governments  
Santa Barbara County Association of Governments  
Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission  
Shasta County Regional Transportation Planning Agency  
Southern California Association of Governments  
Stanislaus Council of Governments  
Tahoe Regional Planning Agency  
Transportation Agency for Monterey County  
Tulare County Association of Governments  
Tuolumne County Transportation Council  
Ventura County Transportation Commission  
Western Riverside Council of Governments

### CONSTITUTIONAL MEMBERS

California State Association of Counties  
League of California Cities

The extensive work that is required to be completed by the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in developing the SCS should be given the first priority for funding. Moreover, there must be sufficient funds set aside for those programs before committing any significant funding for other purposes.

The funding amount for all the regions should be \$20 million with a recognition that it might cost more and some of the remaining funds need to be held until that is known. The \$20 million total is based upon surveys CALCOG and the League of California Cities conducted among the MPOs soon after passage of SB 375 but before these *Draft Guidelines* were even drafted.

We recommend that one-third of the funds should go to the regions and two-thirds to local governments.

In addition, the Strategic Growth Council should recognize that some rural regional agencies that are not required to implement SB 375 may wish to voluntarily implement portions of it. Their applications should be submitted directly to the Council and the Council should develop some criteria how those applications will be evaluated.

The regions should each be assured a reasonable amount of funds but be subject to standards developed by the State to ensure that each plan meets the State's objectives and represents a cost effective sustainability strategy.

As part of ensuring that regions receive reasonable funding, the Guidelines should recognize the unique allowance under SB 375 for the development of Sub Regional strategies within the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) region. If a Sub Region (county transportation commission and Sub Regional council of government) choose to complete a Sub Regional strategy under SB 375, these Sub Regions should be eligible for this funding.

In addition, all Councils of Governments (not just SCAG) and County Transportation Commissions within the SCAG region should be eligible to be direct recipients of the funds since they have some responsibilities under SB 375 but not necessarily helping SCAG to prepare a SCS.

It is likely that some regions will not get all of their funding initially. In addition, the State may be able to withhold a portion of the funds for any region whose plan needs further assistance to meet State requirements, with a recognition that those requirements must be sensitive to each region's realistic circumstances.

As a basis for determining applicable requirements, the Guidelines should first look to the language that is used in SB 732. As currently written, the Guidelines either go beyond the qualification requirements set forth under SB 732, or failed to include some requirements altogether.

Many of the requirements set forth under the Guidelines are those which SB 732 requires general plans to meet in order to be eligible for funding, not the requirements set forth for regional plan eligibility.

For instance, SB 732 states that a regional plan should seek to improve transportation. Rather than use this language, the Guidelines borrow from the requirements set forth for general plans, and thus, recommend that the plans reduce automobile use and fuel consumption. For consistency purposes, the requirements set forth under the Guidelines should mirror the actual requirements under SB 732 as closely as possible.

For projects submitted by local governments, we strongly believe that the regions, and not the State, are in the best position to determine which plans, locations, and projects are most appropriate for implementation consistent with the proposed SCS, Regional Blueprint, Clean Air Plan, Habitat Conservation Plan, or other effort that will be a good investment towards a regionally significant outcome or a demonstration that can lead to other effective projects that would not otherwise be likely to proceed.

Accordingly, rather than the State allocating funds to all local governments on a statewide, competitive basis, the State should set aside most of the funding for applications that are prioritized and submitted by the various regions and awarded by the Strategic Growth Council based upon the regional determination regarding which projects best accomplish progress toward the *Sustainable Communities Planning Grant and Incentives Program's* goals and objectives.

This approach is consistent with the long-standing practices regarding the allocation of many funding programs through the California Transportation Commission where regional agencies recommend which projects are clearly ready to move forward, are consistent with regional and State goals, policies and strategies, and can leverage other local, State, and Federal resources.

Another approach that has been suggested by one of CALCOG's member agencies is to follow a model similar to the FTA 5310 program where regional agencies evaluate and score projects nominated by paratransit operators from within their region and the ranked projects are forwarded to the State who makes the final project selection.

Given the likely realities regarding bond issuance timing for these funds, the time needed to conduct a regionally focused effort to solicit and foster appropriate applications consistent with the *Sustainable Communities Planning Grant and Incentives Program* would appear to exist.

Making sure that the regions have sufficient funding to complete their required plans is the critical first step. Allowing the regions to work with their respective partners (including the State agencies represented on the Strategic Growth



Council) in prioritizing the most cost effective and appropriate plans, programs, and projects, will provide a sense of ownership and commitment at the local level that would not otherwise be achieved under a program that simply has each jurisdiction trying to compete at the statewide level.

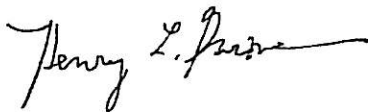
It is imperative that the Strategic Growth Council continue to foster the example being developed in the State of California that builds upon regionally focused planning and development efforts that strengthen the transportation, land use, environmental, economic, and social elements of each region within the context of a healthier more vibrant State.



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